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April 6, 2012

Via First Class and Electronic Mail  
Secretary Michael Krancer  
Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection  
Rachel Carson State Office Building  
400 Market Street  
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17101

**Re: Lathrop Compressor Station Explosion**

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Dear Secretary Krancer,

On March 29, 2012, a gas leak ignited at the Lathrop Compressor Station (Lathrop) in Springville Township, Pennsylvania, causing a large explosion. Residents heard a loud boom that in some cases shook their homes. Residents then witnessed flames and gray and black smoke pouring from the station for hours. We, the undersigned, write to demand a full investigation into the cause of the explosion and the amount of pollution that was emitted into the ambient air. Additionally, we, the undersigned, request full enforcement of the air permits associated with Lathrop including the issuances of violations and fines. Further, we request that the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) take this incident as the harbinger that it is and perform a full review of the safety of permitting natural gas compressor stations, at such a rapid pace, within our communities.

Williams Field Service Co., LLC (Williams), the owners of Lathrop, began flowing gas through the compressor station one day after the explosion. PA DEP requested that Williams "continue to stand down at the site until [they] got an engineer to ...inspect the compressor station and until [they] received a final report from [Williams]." However, Williams chose not to honor that request. PA DEP has indicated that they do not plan to issue an enforcement order now and have not determined whether Williams will be fined for the explosion or for disregarding PA DEP's shutdown request.

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<sup>1</sup> Laura Legere, *DEP: Williams started damaged compressor station without state OK*, **Scranton Times-Tribune**, Apr. 5, 2012, <http://thetimes-tribune.com/news/gas-drilling/dep-williams-restarted-damaged-compressor-without-state-ok-1.1295539#axzz1rAsYEUqU>.

While PA DEP has indicated that they are “disappointed” with Williams that is an insufficient response to this incident. The undersigned are very concerned that Williams may have violated the conditions of their permits and demand that these permits be enforced to their fullest extent.

Williams operates seven engines at Lathrop. Four of the engines are Caterpillar G3608 engines, 2370-2520 bhp @ 900-1000 rpm. These four engines received plan approval 58-329-016 on December 10, 2010. A plan approval is a construction permit and temporary operating permit. According to PA DEP’s EFACTs website, Williams submitted an operating permit application for these four engines on February 6, 2011 and it has not yet been issued. The three other engines are Caterpillar 3516B engines, 1380 bhp @ 1400 rpm. PA DEP issued plan approval 58-329-029 for these three engines on February 15, 2011 and issued a general permit for operation, 58-399-009GP5, on January 26, 2010.

While we, the undersigned, have not reviewed the permits associated with Lathrop and the air emission limits within those permits, it is a synthetic minor. Therefore, it has the potential to emit a major amount of pollution but has agreed to limit its hours or capacity of operation to stay below the major source thresholds. Generally, synthetic minor facilities come very close to tripping those major source thresholds and the emissions from Lathrop’s explosion may very well have led to the facility tripping major source status. Additionally, it is very likely that visible emission limitations were exceeded.

General permits, plan approvals and operating permits require that the source will be “operated in such a manner as not to cause air pollution. (General Permit-5 § 4(a); 25 Pa. Code § 127.402(c); 25 Pa. Code § 127.13a(1)). Air pollution, as defined by 25 Pa. Code § 121.1, includes the “discharging from...open fires...or any other source of any smoke, soot... fumes, oxides, gases, vapors, odors, toxic, hazardous or radioactive substances, waste or other matter in a place, manner or concentration inimical or which may be inimical to public health, safety or welfare or which is or may be injurious to human, plant or animal life or to property or which unreasonably interferes with the comfortable enjoyment of life or property.”

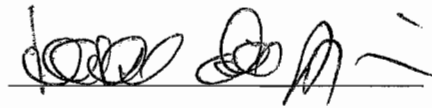
Further, General Permit – 5 (GP-5) requires that a “facility shall be operated and maintained in a manner consistent with good operating and maintenance practices.” Any authorization to operate under the GP-5 that is granted by PA DEP may be suspended or revoked if PA DEP determines that, at any time, that person has failed to operate the natural gas facility in compliance with the terms and conditions of this permit. Upon suspension or revocation of the authorization operation shall cease immediately.

Additionally, a plan approval may be terminated, modified, suspended or revoked and reissued if the permittee constructs or operates the source subject to the plan approval in violation of the Pennsylvania Air Pollution Control Act, the Clean Air Act, the regulations promulgated under either act, a plan approval or permit, or in a manner that causes air pollution.

While we are currently unsure which engine(s) were involved in the explosion, Williams has a GP-5 and a plan approval for operation of their seven engines and there is a clear directive that the facility shall not cause air pollution under either permit. Further, there is clear authority to terminate, suspend or revoke either of these permits.

Similar engines are being placed, at a rapid pace, across rural Pennsylvania, near homes, schools and livestock. The undersigned urges PA DEP to suspend the Lathrop permits while a full investigation is performed. Further, we urge PA DEP to issue violations for Williams's failure to comply with their permit. Once a full investigation is performed we encourage PA DEP to hold a public meeting and explain why the explosion occurred, what was emitted into the air and what subsequent actions were taken by Williams and PA DEP.

The people of Pennsylvania entrust you with protecting public health and the environment and this explosion and subsequent failures by both Williams and PA DEP has rocked that confidence. We urge PA DEP to take strong measures to restore it.



Joseph Otis Minott, Esq.  
Executive Director  
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cc: Shawn Garvin, Regional Administrator, U.S. EPA Region 3  
Michael Bedrin, Director, PA DEP Northeast Regional Office  
Jan H. Freeman, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission

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